

TITLE OF WORK: *A verbatim drama based on the lived experience of women casual academics*

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Research Background

Casual academics comprise more than 60% of academics employed in Australia, most of whom are women. Yet very little is known about the lived experience of these women.

I therefore sought to engage the question, 'How do women casual academics communicate their lived experience'?

As I understand lived experience to be known and communicated through story and narrative, I employed a narrative epistemology as the foundation to this research project's design and communication. In addition, I understand lived experience to be fully embodied, messy and contextually situated. I therefore employed a narrative inquiry to elicit the emotionally and cognitively lived experience of six women casual academics from three different universities in South East Queensland. I then re-presented these stories in the form of 'proto-verbatim theatre' (Duggan, 2013). Proto-verbatim theatre is a contemporary form of performance which employs the words and stories of research participants within a highly theatricalised aesthetic. The form of the genre makes explicit the constructedness of the re-presentation and cognitively and emotionally engages an audience in the stories of Others. I thus employed this form as it is congruent with the fully embodied stories of the research participants and their doubly Othered status as women and casual academics.

Finally, in addition to elements of a traditional PhD dissertation, I developed a drama script, photographs and a live performance of a proto-verbatim theatre production in order to 'show' rather than 'tell' or explain (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) the lived experience of women casual academics. I also deliberately refrained from drawing 'trustworthy conclusion and actionable recommendations' in this dissertation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), as the women casual academics' stories, and my understanding of them, are 'in-the-making' (Childers, Rhee, & Daza, 2013); and the form of my communication seeks congruence with its content. The verbatim theatre is therefore deliberately open-ended and in the making.

Research Contribution

The main aspects of this research project that were new and different from previous research around sessional staffing include a focus on the lived experience of women casual academics, a person-centred approach to research relationships and processes, and the development of a polyvocal, proto-verbatim drama as a form of academic communication.

The primary significance of this study lay in its aim to elicit and re-present the voice of women casual academics in order to extend the current discourses around sessional staffing. Hitherto, the discourses in this area focus upon the causes and consequences of casualisation within the Australian tertiary education sector, within which casual academics' only contribution has been as nameless respondents to pre-determined survey questions. In addition, women casual academics have been represented as part of a homogenised and genderless group of 'sessional staff' situated on the periphery of university life (Kimber, 2003). Women casual academics are thus nameless, voiceless, identity-less, sex/ender-less and seemingly marginalised both within academia and academic discourse. This research is distinctive in providing women an opportunity to make known their lived experience of casual academia so that they no longer suffer the oppression of having to rely on others to gain a sense of self (Belenky et al. 1986, p.31).

This performance also supports the generation of a 'multiplicity of stories and storytellers' within academic organisations (Boje, 1995, p.1000). Therefore, this research project is significant as the first narrative inquiry designed to unearth the words and experience of 'yet to be voiced' women casual academics in Australian universities (Arnot & Reay, 2007).

In conclusion, this research project is significant as the first narrative inquiry designed to unearth the words and experience of 'yet to be voiced' women casual academics in Australian universities (Arnot & Reay, 2007). Its distinctiveness lay also in the polyvocal, dialectical, proto-verbatim form in which the research was presented as this created a unique form of communication through which to express the lived experience of women casual academics.

Research Significance

The performance was awarded a research special presentation award at the Research Conference within which it was presented:

Hi Gail

Your work was powerful, emotive and highly challenging and I have heard positive comments and feedback from staff and students. I am so glad that this was included in Research Week.

The judges and the organising team all agreed that your work, and quality of the presentation by all the team, should be recognised, and today FAB and FoSHEE have put together a token of our appreciation and support to be presented to you at the awards ceremony on Friday. I hope that you'll be able to make it

Thank you again for making this year's research week and FAB research day such a success.

Cheers

Christian

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It also elicited invitations to be presented at other research conferences including USC's Learning and Teaching Week, for which it won the People's Choice Best Overall Presentation and the National Union for Tertiary Education National Conference on Insecure Work in Australia.